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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-3102

March 22, 2007

The Honorable Robert Gates  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates,

On March 9, 2007, I visited Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the National Naval Medical Center in response to the news reports regarding housing conditions at Walter Reed's Building 18. The next day, along with New Mexico Governor Richardson, I toured the Albuquerque Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) and got an updated look at our primary veterans' hospital facility in New Mexico.

After observing conditions and hearing from patients at each facility, it is my understanding the greatest issue at hand is the slow, bureaucratic handling of patients' claims, medical records and access to care. I am submitting to you the following questions concerning soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and would appreciate a prompt response regarding these issues:

- 1.) What system is in place to notify the New Mexico Veterans' Health Care System of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan?
- 2.) How do you ensure the efficient sharing and transfer of records between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)?
- 3.) What system is utilized to ensure caseloads of returning soldiers are effectively administered in a timely manner?
- 4.) How does the VA work with DoD to track returning soldiers who do not seek VA care immediately upon return?
- 5.) What efforts are underway to improve information sharing between DoD and VA?
- 6.) How long must the average returning soldier wait to receive an appointment for follow-up care with a primary physician in New Mexico?

COMMITTEES:

**FINANCIAL SERVICES**

SUBCOMMITTEES:

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND CONSUMER CREDIT

**HOMELAND SECURITY**

SUBCOMMITTEES:

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ECONOMIC SECURITY, INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION AND CYBERSECURITY

INTELLIGENCE, INFORMATION SHARING AND TERRORISM RISK ASSESSMENT

**RESOURCES**

SUBCOMMITTEES:

WATER AND POWER

ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

DISTRICT OFFICES:

400 NORTH TELSHOR  
SUITE E  
LAS CRUCES, NM 88011  
(505) 522-2219

1717 WEST 2ND STREET  
SUITE 100  
ROSWELL, NM 88201  
(505) 622-0055

1923 NORTH DAL PASO  
HOBBS, NM 88240  
(505) 392-8325

111 SCHOOL OF MINES ROAD  
SOCORRO, NM 87801  
(505) 838-7516

- 7.) What measures are used by the VA to rate patient satisfaction and solicit feedback? What are the results, specifically from returning soldiers?
- 8.) How many returning soldiers currently are receiving care at the Albuquerque VAMC? Are there support services available for those soldiers? Please specify.
- 9.) How is the VA ensuring PTSD programs are available in New Mexico? How many returning soldiers are being treated for PTSD in New Mexico?
- 10.) What programs are in place in New Mexico to deal with traumatic brain injuries?

I appreciate your prompt attention to these questions and look forward to your response. It is imperative that the VA and DoD work together to ensure our nation's returning soldiers and veterans receive quality, timely and comprehensive care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Pearce", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Steve Pearce  
Member of Congress

SEP/jlt

cc: Jim Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans' Affairs  
George Marnell, Director of New Mexico VA Health Care System